

Letter from Alexander Graham Bell to Mabel Hubbard Bell, June 14, 1887, with transcript

Alexander Graham Bell to Mrs. Bell. Parker House, Boston, June 14th, 1887. My darling Mabel:

I love you very much and only wish I could be with you now. The arguments here, though not touching the merits of the Government Suit — are to me of absorbing interest.

The question concerns the power of the Government to bring such a suit. The Attorney General is called upon to show by what authority he acts. The question is of the greatest importance to all inventors. I am very much disappointed in the appearance of the Judges who have the case in hand. They do not appear to me to possess the necessary mental calibre — to decide rightly — so intricate a problem. Judge Nelson — who listens very attentively — does not impress me favorably. To my mind he has a bad face — although Mr. Storrow says he is a good man. Perhaps after all he is only an ugly man — certainly no one could call him a beauty.

The other Judge — Judge Colt — has a weak face. He is quite a young man in appearance — a little foppish — and does not seem to listen to the arguments at all — certainly he paid little or no attention to Mr. Storrow. His eyes were everywhere excepting upon the speaker. The slightest movement of any one in any part of the Court Room distracted his attention. His face wore rather a scornful expression during the whole of Storrow's argument — but he relapsed into smiles and bows the moment the Government Counsel commenced.

It is pretty evident that he commences his judicial investigation with a strong Government bias.

Library of Congress

You can't judge anything from Judge Nelson's countenance. He sits like a statue — and appears to listen attentively. The speakers so far have been Storrow, Lowry, Ex-Solicitor General Good, Mr. Chauncey Smith, and Mr. Thurman.

Mr. Thurman (who is very feeble and evidently in pain from some serious ailment) continues tomorrow morning and then Mr. Dickerson will close.

I was glad to hear Mr. Chauncey Smith. I thought he made a very powerful speech — and touched Judge Colt, at least Judge Colt listened to him much more attentively than to Storrow.

I think there is a great deal in what you say about Gleason. I am afraid I shall have to give him up and yet I do not know what to do. It is a great thing to have a man who is thoroughly honest and trustworthy — and conscientious — and I do not wish to part with him at all.

I doubt the wisdom of having a workshop or laboratory at all. It is an expensive way of carrying out imperfectly — one's ideas. The fact is Washington is no place in which to carry out inventions. If we only lived in the neighbourhood of a large city — I could have apparatus made in a large workshop — as I did at Willims' in Boston at any time. In a small workshop with one workman — it takes forever to have the slightest thing done and ideas cool before anything is accomplished. If on the other hand a staff of workmen should be engaged — then they must all be kept in work and that means giving myself up to the laboratory exclusively.

3

Things must drag on as they are for a while until I get the Deaf-mute Investigation off my hands. I will make Mrs. Pratt's engagement in November and bend every energy to finish that. Then the Spelling Machine must be finished. It blocks the way for everything else just now. That is the thing I have determined to finish — first — if it takes a life time. I am sick

Library of Congress

and tired of both the deaf-mute investigation and that spelling machine. I have done too much work upon both to have my labor thrown away and I will finish them if I do nothing else in life. I long to be able to go on with a very different subject which by the bye you have not alluded to in your list of dormant inventions although to my mind it is my greatest, viz — the apparatus for moulding sound vibrations at will.

This is a letter — my dear — written against the grain. I never was in a more un-writing mood. But I feel I owe you more than an occasional telegram. Don't urge me to work any more for money. I don't wish to do it. The subjects I long to work at are nearly all unremunerative in their nature. I think the fault with us does not lie in our income — or in the amount we spend on ourselves. Our income is good enough and if we cannot manage to live comfortably on what we have we do not deserve to have it all. The trouble lies in the draining power of “Science”— and in Laboratory — Secretary — etc. — which take huge slices out of our income and unremunerative investments made for the benefit of friends which cut into capital. I'll tell you what I will do my dear. “Science” shall not rob you any more nor will I ask you to support my laboratory or scientific investigation.

4

I will use graphophone stock so far as it will go for these purposes — and that will give you immediate relief. If Graphophone stock gives out — then Science, Laboratory etc must STOP.

I have given up all thoughts of a steam yacht for the present. We cannot afford it just now. A steam-launch also is quite unnecessary at present. These can wait until we build on Red Head.

Had we not better stop Mr. McCurdy from buying any more land on Red Head — too till our pecuniary affairs are easier.

I find that the plans of our new house have been based upon an estimate of sixty thousand dollars and the house would cost much more. I am not willing to consider the house at all.

Library of Congress

I told Mr. Jacques to make the plans on a basis of 35 or 40 thousand dollars — as fifty thousand was to be our outside figure. Instead of this he has commenced with \$60,000 and the house he has planned will be much more than that.

Let us be contented for the present with renting or buying a small house — and let us sell the Conn. Avenue lot and invest the proceeds in some remunerative investment.

So far as I am concerned I shall never be happy in a City Lot at all.

The Linthicum Place — or your father's house in Cambridge is my ideal. I want elbow-room and breathing space all round. There are many places in Georgetown I would prefer to any prison in the City even though built of marble and gilt. The children too want space outside — large grounds — big trees. I don't want to build in Washington at all. I don't want to build at all. Let 5 us buy some place already built with large private grounds all round — with big trees — and fresh air.

I have followed your about w riting without stopping. I won't read over what I have written for fear I should be tempted to tear the whole thing up. If you like reading this slipshod sort of letter — let me know — and I may perhaps try again if I have the chance.

I don't intend to give myself the chance though for a long time — for I am tired of being away from you — and my dear little babies — and shall rush right home before I can be tempted to take up pen and ink again.

I am tired — Good night — my dear little wife — my pretty little “middle aged” young wife of twenty nine—! (goosey!)

Good night, Alec.